



County of Santa Cruz

Health Services Agency
1080 Emeline Avenue, Santa Cruz, CA 95060

Face Covering Order, April 24, 2020 Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Why did the Health Officer issue this order?

- People can be infected with COVID-19 and not have any symptoms, meaning they are asymptomatic, but they can still be contagious.
- Wearing a face covering, when combined with physical distancing of at least 6 feet and frequent hand washing, may reduce the risk of transmitting coronavirus to others when in public and engaged in essential activities.
- Face coverings reduce the spread of respiratory droplets that happens during talking, sneezing, coughing and laughing.

What does the order require?

The Order generally requires you to wear a face covering in public settings when coming into contact with people outside of your household. This includes waiting in line to enter an essential business, when seeking healthcare from healthcare operations, and when waiting for or riding public transportation. Essential workers must wear face coverings where the public is present or likely to be present. This rule takes effect at 11:59 p.m. on April 24, 2020.

When do I have to wear a face covering?

Face coverings are required to be worn:

- While inside or waiting in line to enter an essential business, like a grocery store or pharmacy.
- When seeking health care.
- When waiting for or riding public transit.
- When entering facilities allowed to operate under the shelter-in-place order, like government buildings.

When is a face covering not needed?

Face coverings are not required to be worn when:

- At your place of residence (house, apartment, car, tent).
- In your car alone or solely with members of your household.
- When working at an essential business when not interacting with others.

- Exercising outdoors, like walking, hiking, bicycling, or running. However, it is recommended to have a face covering with you and readily accessible when exercising, even if you are not wearing it at that moment.

Who is exempt?

The following categories of people are not required to wear a face covering:

- Children 12 years old or younger. Children age 2 and under must not wear a face covering due to the risk of suffocation. Children age 3 to 12 are encouraged, but not required to wear a face covering. If they do, they should be supervised by an adult. Supervision may look different based on the age and maturity of the child. For some children, having a discussion may be sufficient. For younger children, parents and caretakers should be present during use by the child. Parents and care givers should use their judgement.
- Anyone who has trouble breathing, is incapacitated, or otherwise unable to remove a face covering without assistance.
- Anyone who has been advised by a medical professional not to wear a face covering.
- Any worker to the extent wearing a face covering creates a safety hazard at work under established health and safety guidelines.

How long will the face covering requirement last?

The face covering order does not have an expiration date. The Health Officer will evaluate the continuing need for a face covering, but it is expected that the requirement will continue for months in order to keep the infection rate as low as possible until better prevention and treatment options are available.

What kind of face covering should I be wearing?

Most of us can use cloth face coverings, which function as an additional tool that can protect others from possible exposure to respiratory droplets that may come from our mouth when we talk, sneeze or cough. Such as:

- Homemade masks
- Bandanas
- Neck gaiters
- T-shirts
- Towels or other cloth materials

Face coverings should:

- Fit snugly but comfortably against the side of the face
- Be secured with ties or ear loops
- Include multiple layers of fabric
- Allow for breathing without restriction

N95's and surgical masks should be reserved for the use of frontline healthcare staff and other workers who provide care to a person who might have COVID-19 or other communicable diseases.

How often should I clean my face coverings?

Face coverings should be washed frequently. Ideally, wash them after each use and have a dedicated laundry bag or bin. Always wash your hands, or use hand sanitizer, before and after touching your face or face coverings.

What shouldn't I use as a face covering?

- Any mask that has a one-way valve designed to facilitate easier exhaling does not qualify as a face covering under this order and should not be used. These valves are typically a raised plastic disk about the size of a quarter on the front or side of the mask. Valves of that type allow moisture droplets out of the mask, putting others nearby at risk.
- A Halloween or plastic mask does not comply with the order.
- A ski mask with holes for the nose or mouth does not comply with the order.

Should I buy a medical mask?

- Medical-grade masks are in short supply and need to be reserved for healthcare workers on the frontlines.
- We are managing our supply levels closely and providing health workers and first responders with medical-grade personal protective equipment that is aligned with the latest evidence-based science, and appropriate for their work duties.

Do I need to wear a face covering at home?

You are not required to use a face covering at home. But if you or someone at home is sick, you can use a face covering to reduce exposure. You should contact your healthcare provider if you or someone in your home is sick.

How does this rule affect businesses and transportation?

- Generally, essential businesses must ensure that their employees and other staff wear a face covering in any area when working with the public or in areas where customers or the public may be present, even if there are no customers or members of the public present at the time. This is to avoid the spreading of respiratory droplets in areas where customers or the public may come at some point.
- Essential businesses must inform customers about the need to wear a face covering, including posting signs at the entrance to the store or facility. They also must take reasonable steps to keep people who are not wearing a face covering from entering their business; and they must refuse service to anyone (other than children under 12 and others who may specifically be exempted under the order) not wearing a face covering.
- All workers and volunteers at essential businesses, operating public transportation, or operating other types of shared transportation must wear a face covering when at work in most settings. (However, they do not need to wear one in a private office when others are not around, for example.)
- Workers doing minimum basic operations, like security or payroll, essential infrastructure work, or government functions must wear a face covering when others are nearby or when they are in areas that the public regularly visits.

I have some protective face covering equipment, such as N95 masks. What can I do with them?

Many have asked how they can help our nurses, doctors & healthcare workers. If you want to donate/know of businesses that may be able to help with personal protective equipment (PPE) like surgical masks, N95 face masks, face shields & other supplies, please visit [Santa Cruz County PPE Donations](#) to find out more.

I operate an essential business or another business or facility that is permitted by the shelter in place order to engage in minimum basic operations or to provide essential infrastructure. What am I required to do under the order?

- Generally you must ensure that your employees and other staff wear a face covering in any area when working with the public or in areas where customers or the public may be present, even if there are no customers or members of the public present at the time. This is in order to avoid the spreading of respiratory droplets in areas where customers or the public may be at some point. Employees also must wear masks if co-workers are nearby.
- You are also required to post a sign at entrances notifying people that they are not permitted in without a face covering and that they will not be served if they are not wearing a face covering. You should also not serve anyone over the age of 12 who is not wearing a face covering unless they are excused by the Order from wearing a face covering

What are reasons that someone is allowed not to wear a face covering in an essential business or when around other people who are not a member of their own household?

The following are exceptions to the requirements for wearing a face covering when in essential businesses or when other people are around:

- A child 12 years old or younger;
- A medical professional has advised you that wearing a face covering may pose a risk to your health, and you have documentation of that advisement;
- Wearing a face covering would create a risk to you related to your work as determined by local, state, or federal regulators or workplace safety guidelines;
- You have trouble breathing;
- You are unconscious, incapacitated, or otherwise unable to remove the face covering without assistance.

I'm going to my doctor or health care provider for an appointment. Am I required to wear a face covering?

Yes. You should wear a face covering when in an environment with other people you do not live with. But your health care provider can allow you to remove the face covering as appropriate in the context for purposes related to your care.

Who can I call if I have questions?

The County's COVID-19 call center is now open 7 days a week from 8am – 6pm. The number is 831-454-4242. Outside of these hours you can still call United Way's 211 call center and is also available by texting COVID-19 to 211-211.